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THE FUNCTION OF THE EDUCATED AND OF  
THE UNEDUCATED MINISTRY

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In one sense of the word there is of course no place in the ministry for the uneducated man. The preacher who is so ignorant as to be illiterate—illiterate in that he does not read and study and observe—is not to be thought of as a candidate for the ministry. If, on the other hand, we think of the educated minister as the student who has been graduated from college and from theological seminary, we rather narrowly limit our definition of education. Many men of unusual success in the ministry have preferred to take graduate work along certain specific lines rather than to pursue the course in the seminary. In this they may have been mistaken, but of course they belong by pre-eminent right in the ranks of the educated. Moreover, the fact of actually receiving a degree is not the chief essential. Perhaps for our purpose we may define the educated minister as one who has in a reputable college, university, or seminary mastered the point of view of the scholar, attained some success in the use of scholarly methods, and acquired scholarly habits. For our purpose the uneducated minister is one who has not received his training at such an institution. We assume, however, in our use of the word “uneducated” that the minister has studious habits, and that he does the best he can to make good by incessant effort the lack of early institutional training; otherwise we can hardly see what place he has in the ministry. We may be permitted further to

drop from our consideration both the occasional pulpit "genius," who comes to popular power without formal mental training, and also that bearer of scholastic degrees who is remarkable chiefly for his dulness.

That in the discussion of the theme before us we are dealing with a real problem is obvious. The idea for which we stand and for which we must stand is that the minister should be graduated from college and from theological seminary. As a matter of fact, however, good pulpits in every denomination are filled by men whose technical educational training has been of the slightest, frontier communities are served by preachers who have never been near college, and important Christian bodies like the Church of England are pleading for a greater place for lay preaching. If all the theological schools now in the United States were to be crowded to their utmost capacity, they could not fill with their graduates all the pulpits becoming vacant year by year in the United States. In addition, there is more and more of a conviction that there will always be a place for some preachers who are not in the strict institutional sense educated. The present writer feels that with the abundant collegiate opportunities today only the rarest circumstances should justify the reception of a man into the ministry who is not at least a college graduate; but he faces the fact that there are many who insist that some of the most effective preaching has been done, for example, by laymen whose only training has been in the business career.

We may best approach our theme by considering some phrases in which the common-sense of men has marked out a line between the educated and the uneducated. Some familiar expressions draw the line between the functions of the technically educated and those of the uneducated for human activities in general. It may be that the examination of these phrases will throw light upon the problem before us.

First of all, we have in common speech a distinction between the expert in a particular field and the layman in that field. We hear constantly about reliance upon the expert, and we hear with equal frequency of the need of balancing the skilled knowledge of the expert with the good sense and poise of the ordinary layman. In his very suggestive book on *Public Opinion and Popular Government* President Lowell discusses the spheres of the expert and of the layman in governmental activities. There are some spheres that manifestly belong to the expert. It would be folly for the layman to try to pass upon the merits of a system of water supply, or upon a scheme of municipal sanitation, or upon a bill for the regulation of currency issues. But there are positions of great importance in public life which are better filled by men who are not specialists or who are more than specialists. President Lowell enumerates as the qualities desirable in those who are to occupy public positions which do not call for expert knowledge, quickness of apprehension, breadth of sympathy, and soundness of judgment.

In this distinction between the expert and the man of more general knowledge we have a suggestion of some importance for the question before us. In those phases of ministerial effort which require expert knowledge it is hard to see how we can get along without the aid of the theological school. In the phases which require quickness of apprehension, width of sympathy, and soundness of judgment the formal education may not be so complete. Today we require more of a minister than that he shall be a good preacher or teacher. He must be, as we say, a man among men. There is in one of the Colorado mining camps today a minister who has had more influence upon the miners during the recent months of coal strike than perhaps any other minister in Colorado. He has been better able to hold the miners back from

violence than any other man in the fields. Yet this man has had very little formal education. In his earlier years he was a machinist in Scotland and he has passed all his life since among the day-laborers. He is able to see the meaning of a situation quickly, can sympathize with both employers and employed, and very rarely makes even a slight mistake in judgment. While this particular preacher might not make a very good technical showing before an examining board of a theological seminary, he is simply invaluable in his present position. In reality he is an educated man. Out of a salary of seven hundred dollars he buys and reads such books as Dewey's *How We Think*, Dods' *The Bible; Its Nature and Origin*, Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Peabody's *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*. It is true that these books are in the course of study prescribed for him by the ministerial organization to which he belongs, but he pursues the studies with such eagerness and success as to pass a good examination in the books.

The lack of at least some measure of expert knowledge becomes most apparent when the untrained men begin to discourse on themes which involve the modern methods of Biblical study. With the attacks on such methods by the untrained men we are all familiar, but the advocacy of the methods and the attempted use of them by untrained men is almost as distressing. It is quite significant that a large part of the reckless and foolish utterances concerning modern Biblical study comes from students of theological seminaries where the critical problems are not frankly faced and thought through, or from men who have tried to work their way through these problems by themselves. The student trained in a school where the modern methods are fully and freely taught is apt to be the true conservative when he gets out to his work. For one thing, he is more apt to see the actual scope of the

critical method and to preserve the correct emphasis. And it is rather a dangerous exercise for the minister to try to master modern methods by himself. He may lose all sense of perspective. In nothing is a theological education more valuable than in the correction of the critical temper by the community-spirit in the school. It is a fair question as to whether a man ought to try to do much with critical methods except in a decidedly human atmosphere which is lit by at least an occasional ray of humor. The writer of this article recalls a young man who went from an Eastern college of high grade into the pastorate of a church without having studied the higher criticism for an hour. It was back in the days when Goldwin Smith was saying that the Old Testament is the millstone about Christianity's neck. In conversation with the writer the young minister announced that as a result of his studies he had concluded that Christianity must strike the Old Testament from the Scriptures altogether! A course in the Old Testament under an expert would not necessarily have made an expert of this particular student, but it would have saved him from some excesses which have marred an otherwise excellent ministry.

It is well known that the great State universities of the Middle West cannot in harmony with their character as parts of the public educational system take direct hold of the problem of religious instruction. It was the custom for many years to leave the religious instruction in these schools largely to the Young Men's Christian Association secretaries. These were for the most part young college graduates with no particular training in theological thinking. They were, with marvellously few exceptions, splendid men who exerted great influence on the life of those with whom they came in touch. The wholesomeness of their character was and is contagious. The Y. M. C. A. college secretary is very

likely to have all the qualities which President Lowell enumerated as making for the strength of the man who is serviceable to the community by his general intelligence,—quickness of apprehension, width of sympathy, and soundness of judgment. One of the ways the secretary showed this soundness of judgment was in calling in the help of someone else when dealing with students perplexed by the teachings in biology and history and social science—the students, for example, trying to harmonize the child's view of the Bible which they brought with them to college with the man's view of everything else which their studies were giving them. But the secretary could not always be calling on someone outside for help; so that the churches have been more and more placing college pastors with the best technical training at the seats of the State universities. These fields, which, by the way, are among the most promising before American Protestantism, are being cultivated today with a sound understanding of the difference in the function of the man of general aptitudes and of the expert, with an increasingly wise use of each type and with an unusually large measure of success.

We would not have it imagined that this line drawn between expert and lay can always be drawn between the formally educated and those whose education has not been institutional. In some fields the expert knowledge can be gained only by actual experience. Some spheres of practical church activity are so new that the theological schools have not until very recently been able to offer systematic courses covering such activities. The writer happens to be connected with the Methodist Episcopal Church. The best two churches to his knowledge in that denomination so far as general community influence is concerned—churches that enter as positive factors into educational, industrial, and civic affairs in addition to what are more technically thought of as religious

activities—are both presided over by ministers who did not complete a seminary course. One of these ministers was graduated from college and went to his field after one year in the seminary. The other was graduated from college and took elaborate courses in post-graduate social science in a university. In their student days nothing was offered in theological schools which would have dealt with the questions which they have been so successful in solving. On the other hand, we do not mean that quickness of apprehension, width of sympathy, and soundness of judgment are the sole property of men who have been self-educated. It would be hard to find a definition of the aim of college education which would be more apt than that of increasing quickness of apprehension, width of sympathy, and soundness of judgment. All that we mean is that these qualities are more likely to be obtained by self-instruction and by large experience in the world than is specialized expert knowledge in a particular field. It will be recalled that so high an authority as President Eliot gave it as his belief that the faithful and considerate reading of a certain set of books, a set which could be contained in a five-foot shelf, would give any man the essentials of a liberal education. But the reading of a five-foot shelf of books might not make a man an expert in any direction.

A second line of division drawn in popular speech between forms of activity which require differing degrees of academic training is that between the extensive and the intensive. The expression has become current through the present day movement toward better farming methods. As the land of the nation has become more and more densely populated there has arisen an increased demand that we get more from the land than ever before. So that the young man who once would have gone West "to take up land," now goes to the agri-



cultural department of the university to find how to produce more from the land which he already holds. The distinction between extensive and intensive is of value at least in suggestiveness in many fields besides agriculture.

There are some preachers of large popular qualities—using the word “popular” in the very best sense—whose education has been of the most general character. Such men have ordinarily been wide readers, have moved among all classes of persons, and have developed the power to discern the mind of the masses with a certainty amounting almost to intuition. They are popular not necessarily in the sense of pleasing the people but in the sense of understanding the people and of interpreting the people to themselves. They meet Gladstone’s definition of an orator in that they send back upon their hearers in shower what they take from their hearers in cloud. Now this may be, very often is, most powerful preaching. The denomination suffers which has not some such men. But the preaching belongs to what we might call the extensive type. It is adapted to large audiences, and no large audience remains the same for any length of time. Such men impress immense numbers in the course of a year and impress them for good. But there is apt to be a sameness about the preaching. One sitting under the ministry of such a preacher year in and year out might miss a certain instructional quality in the message. The hearer might feel that vast human aspirations and longings and struggles were being focussed in the preaching week by week to his marked spiritual profit, but he might not hear much that would specifically touch upon particular difficulties on which he would crave light. But we need these capacious pulpit channels of human interest and feeling and thought wherever we can find them. As long as they point toward the loftiest and best we must keep them open by every encouragement

in our power. We must judge such ministers by their success in helping the multitudes, and not put on any airs of superiority toward them if they do not set as much store by formal training as we would like to have done by the accredited prophets of the church.

But there is another type of prophet—the man who after prolonged study and reflection and musing instructs his people in the truth of the kingdom. This prophet does not minister to such crowds as does the other, but his influence—if not on his immediate day then on the day to come—is even more potent than that of his more conspicuous brother. This minister's spirit of self-sacrifice shows itself in the extent to which he is willing to give himself to patient search for truth. His audiences may be comparatively small; they may consist through the years of chiefly the same persons. In the long run, however, his influence reaches out to the multitudes and becomes part of their thinking, even though they are not aware of the source of the spiritual stream. It is not too much to say that there is slight chance of a man's becoming a prophet of this latter type without the advantage of the start given by good academic and professional training. The starting-place for the true advance in thinking is from the best which the student can receive in the schools of his day.

This distinction between extensive and intensive appears very clearly in the difference between evangelistic effort and Christian nurture. Every minister who achieves substantial results must be in some manner and in some degree evangelistic. The kingdom will make no advance if there is not evangelism. Evangelistic skill is rare, and seems not to be as dependent upon academic religious instruction as are some other forms of religious activity. The reason for this is often that the evangelist is a man of some striking religious experience. He has perhaps been a transgressor and has

found his way back to right living; or he is of that particular emotional temperament which is marked by crises. Now there are multitudes of persons in the world who are transgressors and multitudes who are of the constitution fitted to come to sharp inner crisis. What such persons need is just to hear the good news; and when an evangelist can tell forcefully the story of his own experience he will surely bring some others to like experience with his own. Here is a great field for lay preaching in our time. There are men who can tell from their own experience, without violating the religious proprieties or good taste, how to find the way into a new life. To say that there is no place for such preachers is to speak out of blindness. But not every one is fitted for such evangelistic appeal. Some ministers are of such temperament as not to have known a striking experience which compels the attention of men in its very telling. Some have never been outbreaking transgressors. These preachers can speak persuasively to some about the entrance into the kingdom of God, but they are not equipped for attracting those to whom the popular evangelist makes his appeal.

But when the evangelist untrained in theological thinking begins to expound theology confusion is at the door. We speak often of the distinction between religion and theology, but we sometimes forget how closely the two are interwoven. The evangelist himself may hold a particular theory of Biblical inspiration or of atonement and may not discriminate between his theory and his experience. He is not an authority on theology as he is an authority on human repentance. In many regions of the country today an extreme form of premillenarianism is being taught by teachers who are admittedly successful as evangelists. Premillenarianism may be right or wrong, but it cannot be at present anything but a matter of speculative theology. It

surely is not possible for a preacher to speak with the same authority on premillenarianism as on the need of repentance.

We would not leave the impression that the untrained are to look upon evangelism as their particular field. The trained scholar may be even more successful in popular evangelism than the untrained preacher; but we do mean that if a preacher will stick close to life and experience, he can be a winner of men of certain temperamental types or of certain types of moral career without having been formally trained for the ministry. When we enter the sphere of Christian nurture, however, we require a different order of ability. Here we demand all possible light on different types of character and different methods of presenting the truth. As an instance, think how much of psychological data is being placed in the hands of the ministry today as an equipment for winning and holding lives for the Christian religion. The church has come to see that it is Christian duty to hold children fast from the beginning, so that devout scholars have studied the child-life as never before. Moreover, we have come to see that the growing life is most apt to fall away from the church at the period between sixteen and twenty years of age, and the teachers have worked out for the minister a careful set of conclusions as to adolescent psychology. Again, it is becoming manifest that middle life brings its peculiar temptations, and life at that period is being scientifically studied. Now this does not mean that men are to be saved by psychology, but psychology is the study of life, after all. It is hard to see how a conscientious minister, anxious to hold his parishioners for the kingdom of God, can afford to neglect any light upon human life which he can gain from any source whatever. But the difficulty is that the untrained man does not always know how to use rightly the instruments which modern scientific study places at his disposal.

In the pastoral activities there is an extensive work of great value. There is the minister who is somewhat of a hail-fellow-well-met, who meets an almost incredible number of persons in the course of a week and does them good with a hearty greeting. It will not be wise to minimize the importance of such pastoral attention. In some fields, especially in the larger cities, this minister's word of cheer is the only vitally human hail which many persons hear from the beginning of the week to the end. There is, however, a type of service which this man may never render—the work of deep spiritual counsel and of religious guidance through hard stresses. For this sort of service the more highly trained the minister the better. All that he knows and all that he can get from the best institutional influences of his time, all that he has learned in the severest study, will not be too much if he is to help human lives at some bitter crises. Happy the church that has for pastor a well-trained man who is willing to place his full ability at the service of the lives that need serious counsel in times of religious or other strain. Such pastors increase in power through the years. The only minister who stands large chance of being forceful through the long run is the thoroughly educated man. Almost any congregation will bear with shortcomings and inadequacies in a young man, for there is magnetic charm about youth. But after a while the charm of youth wears off, and the shortcomings seem intolerable. The only charm that endures in a minister is the charm of a cultivated spirit which brings all its wealth to bear in helpfulness toward human beings. Except in very rare instances the pastorates of the untrained preacher will be short. Denominations which have some system of centralized administration can carry him through a succession of short pastorates with success, but they can hardly expect from him the intensive work required in a long pastorate.

Still another suggestive distinction worked out into common phrase is that between work which is negative and that which is positive, or that which is destructive and that which is constructive. Some forms of negative and destructive work in every field are valuable. When we see the need of assault upon evils in the social sphere today we realize that there is a task of destructive character which almost every prophet is called upon to undertake. The attack upon industrial and political and social abuses is destructive work and yet is important. The ground must be cleared for the new building.

In this realm of social advance it would seem that we have a sphere where formal academic training does not always seem to be a requisite. True, the universities of our land today are not apt to be lacking in radicalism; but the most telling service in the attack upon evils is often rendered by men who have no wide knowledge beyond that of the distressing facts which they describe. Reform comes through public opinion. The power generated for reform is that of aroused public sentiment; but, public opinion being what it is, carefully balanced statements do not arouse the public mind as do the fiery invectives of the orator-agitator. We are speaking now of the way things are, not of how they ought to be. It does not require any especial skill to ring an alarm bell—and alarm bells are often needed. Now, better have these alarms rung by men whose earnestness is genuine, coming out of first-hand acquaintance with the evils, than to have the earnestness assumed by men who of set purpose omit all qualifications and modifications. We need in the pulpit today that boldness of speech which comes out of experience at first hand with the sufferings of those who are not getting half a chance under present social conditions. Such sufferers never will get their chance unless the prophets cry aloud as unsparingly as did the prophets of old.

A minister need not be a graduate of a seminary or college to see an evil and to call attention to it with vigor and directness. But even the task of destruction on a large scale demands thorough training. The soldier's work is destructive, and the individual soldier can fight furiously without academic training. All he absolutely needs beyond a downright fighting spirit is a knowledge of how to shoot. But in the higher realms of strategy only the educated leader can be depended upon. Only one or two soldiers came to positions of important general command in the American Civil War who had not been to West Point. The minister who expects to attain the largest effectiveness in the attack on social evils must have more than fighting spirit.

When we pass to the constructive aspect, of course any thought of success in social improvement without trained leadership is out of the question. It would be ridiculous if it were not so tragic to see groups of well-meaning ministerial enthusiasts for social reform come together to agree upon plans, and then show by their speech that they know nothing of the literature of such reform movements, nothing of the history of social progress, nothing of political economy or of the theory of the State. Let the minister call attention to social evils with all his power; but before he begins to offer advice as to how to deal positively, and constructively, let him take a few stiff courses in economics and the more serious social sciences, or let him read the solidier writers on such themes as trades-unionism and socialism. The result may be that his pulpit utterances on these themes will be few and well considered, and that he will exert his chief influence in these directions through organizations which try to deal with the details of social improvement in expert and intelligent fashion.

As a final distinction drawn in popular speech we would instance that between theology and religion, which is

the application to the sphere of religion of the distinction between theory and life. We have often heard of the persons who "love flowers but who care nothing for botany," and there is, of course, deep significance in the distinction. The supreme qualification for success in the ministry is spiritual life, and the life may have come to great power and fruitage without help from schools. We lay more and more stress upon the contagion of life itself, and we are willing to place any religious life in any position which will lead to the spread of the life. Light is not to be kept in a corner. The preacher must be of value, in the last analysis, because of what he is. We said at the beginning that there is no place in the ministry for the man who is uneducated in the sense that he is ignorant. But for the man whose education has been in the school of life and who in that life has come to profound knowledge of life on the religious side there is large place, especially if he have the gift of communicating himself.

But it is entirely possible so to draw the distinction between botany and flowers and between theology and religion as to suggest that botany and theology are not particularly worth while. Theology correctly understood is an instrument for the enrichment and deepening of religious life; and the fact that a man is trained in theological thinking ought not to imply that he is any the less abounding in religious life. The better the theology, the better the life—just as it is true that the better the religious life of a time, the better the theology. The man whose education has been chiefly in life itself must contribute to theology chiefly indirectly. He can create the type of life out of which the theology arises. But the task of shaping the theology in the best statements will quite likely continue to be in the future as it has been in the past the task of the trained thinker. We deplore the tendency in many quarters to minimize



the importance of theological thinking. It is true that the criticisms have for the most part been against that hard-and-fast dogmatism which took theology as an end in itself. That type has passed. But theological thinking ought not to be neglected, for it is a veritable means of grace and life. Even the botanists have improved on some types of flowers, and have helped mightily in teaching us to appreciate all types of flowers. There is room for the preacher who, as we say, knows life at first hand. There is room also for him who so works over the data which come out of life as to give us better control of life in the service of God and man.

In drawing this paper to a close it may be permissible to remark that it would be almost hopeless to try to find a preacher not academically trained who has not at one time or other expressed regret at his early lack of educational opportunity. For if education amounts to anything, it means that the educated man is more alive than he would have been without the education; and preaching in the end depends upon the abundance of the life of the preacher.